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ARTICLES:

- (1) Pref. assembly to pass resolution in protest of U.S. serviceman's rape

In the wake of an Okinawa-based U.S. Marine's rape of a junior high school girl, the Okinawa prefectural assembly's special committee on U.S. military bases, chaired by Seiichi Oyakawa, passed a resolution unanimously in protest of the incident. The resolution calls the incident is "an extremely atrocious crime that tramples on human dignity," adding that it is "a mean act that can never be forgiven." The resolution calls for the U.S. forces and others to take every possible measure in order to prevent such an incident from recurring. In the committee meeting, an official from the Okinawa prefectural police revealed that U.S. military personnel have been involved in a total of 14 rape cases (including attempted ones) since 1995. The resolution of protest will be brought up to a plenary sitting of the prefectural assembly today and is expected to be unanimously passed.

In the committee meeting, an official from Okinawa Prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division explained that the total number of off-base registered housing units for rent to U.S. forces was 6,098 as of September last year, including 5,107 contracted houses. In addition, the official also revealed that the prefectural government remains unable to grasp the number of persons living in these houses.

In this connection, Sogi Kayo, a member of the special committee from the Japanese Communist Party, pointed out that Japan remains unable to grasp the number of U.S. servicemen living in off-base housing because U.S. military personnel are not subject to resident registration with local government offices.

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Akira Uehara, chief of the Okinawa governor's office, noted that it would be difficult to have U.S. military personnel living in off-base housing register their residency. "But," Uehara added, "I'd like to consult with other organizations about whether that is possible."

Another member of the special committee, Masaharu Kina, who is with the Okinawa Socialist Masses Party (OSMP), challenged the fact that Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima did not lodge a protest but instead took the form of making a request to U.S. military officials when they called at the prefectural government office. "The governor should have distanced himself more from them," Kina said. Uehara explained, "The governor expressed his regret, but this of course connotes a protest."

In addition, Uehara also stated that the Japanese and U.S. governments responded "very quickly" to the incident. "I think that they are strongly aware of how serious the incident is," he said.

The resolution demands three points: 1) offering apologies to the victim and family as well as making full compensation; 2) taking effective and specific steps for the thoroughgoing prevention of a recurrence; and 3) reducing the U.S. military presence further.

Representatives from the prefectural assembly will present the resolution to Japanese and U.S. government organizations in Okinawa Prefecture tomorrow and to Japanese and U.S. government organizations in Tokyo on Feb. 18-19.

(2) Editorial: Must avoid having the USFJ realignment being affected by Okinawa schoolgirl rape incident

Something that should never have occurred has happened again. A U.S. Marine Corps staff sergeant stationed in Okinawa has been arrested on suspicion of raping a school girl. The incident has deeply damaged the feelings of Okinawa's residents, who have long sought elimination of crimes committed by U.S. servicemen. Both Japan and the U.S. should strictly investigate the case and do their

utmost to prevent a recurrence. They should try to settle the case with great sincerity so that it will not become politicized.

The rape of a girl in 1995 became complicated over how to deal with the accused under the Japan-U.S. Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA). The incident became politicized, shaking the bilateral alliance. The Japan-U.S. Special Action Committee (SACO) on Okinawa, signed an agreement that included the return of Futenma Air Station to Japan. Ten years later, a realignment of U.S. forces in Japan has begun as a follow on to that agreement. The incident this time has occurred at such a time.

The major goal of SACO and the U.S. forces realignment plan, as agreed on in 2006, is to strengthen the deterrence capabilities of the Japan-U.S. alliance and to reduce Okinawa's base burden. In particular, 75 PERCENT of U.S. bases are concentrated in Okinawa. Needless to say, the physical and psychological burdens of U.S. military bases include crimes committed by U.S. servicemen.

Such being the case, a situation in which anti-U.S. base sentiment escalates to an extent of disrupting progress of the realignment of

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U.S. forces in Japan must be prevented by all means. That is the key challenge facing the politics of Japan and the U.S. That is because it would be the reverse of our intention, if efforts to implement the realignment plan aimed at reducing base burden suffer a setback.

Such a situation would serve as a negative factor affecting the bilateral alliance and could threaten the peace and safety of people in Okinawa. Foreign Minister Koumura on Feb. 12 expressed concern, "It is likely that the incident will affect Japan-U.S. relations." He made that comment with such a possibility in mind.

Delicate consideration to the sentiment of people in Okinawa and cool-headed administrative judgment are indispensable in order to facilitate the realignment plan, while obtaining understanding of local people. There is no excuse for the heinous crime that befell the girl. It is only natural that Governor Hirokazu Nakaima has filed a strong protest.

Both Japanese and U.S. authorities must throw light on the case and press ahead with strict procedures, while responding directly to the prefectural residents' anger. It will also be necessary to draft new measures in close cooperation with the local community so that their calls for prevention of a recurrence will not wind up being nothing more than hollow phrases.

Crimes committed by U.S. servicemen are not just Okinawa's problem. All local governments involved in the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan are watching whether the case can be settled in a manner that satisfies local resident. We want the Japanese government not to forget that.

(3) Editorial: Schoolgirl raped in Okinawa -- Another despicable act by an American soldier

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
February 13, 2008

Another incident of U.S. soldier raping a schoolgirl has occurred in Okinawa, creating even greater public concerns. If the incident had occurred one day earlier, a different outcome would likely have come about in the Iwakuni mayoral election in Yamaguchi Prefecture. We have heard over and over promises to do the utmost to prevent a recurrence of such incidents. The government must make serious efforts now to eliminate such crimes.

The alleged rape incident took place on the night of Feb. 10, the same day that a candidate supportive of the planned relocation of U.S. carrier-based aircraft to Iwakuni won the Iwakuni mayoral election. A U.S. Marine Corps staff sergeant at Camp Courtney in Uruma, Okinawa Prefecture, accosted three girls on a local street and drove one of the three to his home. When the girl began crying, the suspect put her into his car and raped her there. Later, police

in Okinawa Prefecture arrested the Marine on the charge of raping the girl. The suspect has denied the allegation.

Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima said angrily: "It is a grave incident that infringes on women's human rights." A wave of anger is spreading across the nation. The Japan-U.S. alliance is supposed to protect the peace and safety of the people and should not be a cause for creating a situation that creates fear among the public. Still, we repeatedly hear news of vulgar acts by U.S. soldiers.

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In 1995, a 12-year-old girl was raped by three U.S. servicemen in Okinawa. This incident sent a shock wave across the nation. Set off by this incident, the governments of Japan and the U.S. agreed on a plan to return Futenma Air Station to Japan and to improve the operation of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement. Despite such agreements, there is no end to crimes involving U.S. servicemen.

Whenever an incident occurs, the government asks the U.S. side to enforce tighter discipline and to take steps to prevent a recurrence of similar crimes. But this kind of incident has once more occurred. The two governments seem hardly aware that the series of incidents could affect the very foundation of the bilateral alliance.

The latest incident also may have some effect on the issue of relocating Futenma Air Station to Nago City. The Nago municipal government has finally agreed to start an environment impact assessment in preparation for constructing runways. In response to this development, the government has decided to provide the municipal government with subsidies linked to accepting the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. As it stands, the relocation issue was about to emerge from a state of deadlock and move forward. But the incident will inevitably make residents react even more fiercely to constructing a new U.S. military facility in their city. The incident is also likely to seriously affect all local governments housing U.S. military bases.

The government should take a resolute attitude in negotiating with the U.S. government on the matter and hold talks with local residents in a sincere manner, instead of resorting to the usual method of exerting influence with money. Prime Minister Fukuda said: "This is a very serious problem. I want you to make utmost efforts to clear up the facts about the incident." In many cases in the past, the prime minister has treated such matters as if they had nothing to do with him.

It is now time to study the possibility of reviewing the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). This agreement contains a number of conditions disadvantageous to Japan. For instance, there is a clause specifying that the custody of an accused member of the U.S. armed forces or a civilian component, if the individual is in the hands of the U.S., shall remain in U.S. military custody until indicted by Japanese authorities. Since the operation of SOFA was improved, the U.S. side has responded to Japan's requests more flexibly, but the U.S. still has discretionary power.

Japan should take a firm stance in dealing with the latest incident, keeping the possibility of revising the SOFA in mind. Taking such a stance might be a shortcut to eliminating crimes by U.S. soldiers. The government must quickly come up with specific countermeasures to put an end to the chain of tragedies.

(4) Editorial: Why another incident in Okinawa?

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 13, 2008

One immoral person's act can seriously undermine the relationship between one country and another. The alleged rape of a junior high schoolgirl in Okinawa by a 38-year-old U.S. Marine Corps staff sergeant is exactly that kind of case. It has rekindled memories of the 1995 gang rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl by three U.S.

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servicemen (also in OkIGQQIG&j:Wqskf(event a recurrence of similar problems.

However, another rape has occurred. Is this because people had forgotten about the incident that occurred 13 years ago? If there is something that is lacking in education, the U.S. military will need to harshly deal with not only the suspect but also those involved with the education of servicemen.

An agreement reached at the Japan-U.S. Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) after the 1995 rape incident included the return to Okinawa of land now used for the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, a symbol of Okinawa's burden of hosting U.S. military bases. But the agreement has not been translated into action as the construction of the alternative facility for Futenma Air Station has been delayed.

Tokyo and Washington agreed in May 2006 to complete the construction of the replacement facility and relocate 8,000 U.S. Marine Corps' personnel to Guam by 2014. If the agreement is implemented even in stages, the burden of U.S. military bases carried by Okinawa will be reduced.

The incident this time could become an obstacle to implementing that agreement. Okinawa residents regard the construction of the alternative facility for Futenma Air Station as a new base. Some argue against relocating the base in Okinawa. It is only natural that the argument against the relocation plan will be strengthened.

The U.S. government, however, considers the relocation of Marine Corps' personnel from Okinawa to Guam and the construction of the replacement facility for Futenma Air Station as requisites for the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. If the construction of the replacement facility is delayed, the relocation of U.S. Marines to Guam will also be delayed. As a result, Okinawa will continue to shoulder the current burden of U.S. military bases as is.

What is important for the Japanese and U.S. governments are: 1) to vow to come up with preventive measures that are convincing and provide relief to the residents of Okinawa; 2) to implement the measures; and 3) to make it specifically understood that the implementation of the Japan-U.S. agreement would reduce Okinawa's

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burden. If the recent rape incident thwarts the implementation of the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, the timetable for Okinawa's burden to be lightened will be delayed.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda should immediately go to Okinawa.

(5) Aso approaching DPJ with eye on becoming prime minister after Fukuda

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 13, 2008

Hiroshi Shinkai

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) former Secretary General Taro Aso has been approaching the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Aso, who thinks highly of himself as a most likely successor to Prime Minister Fukuda, appears to be making preparations to deal with the lopsided Diet, in which the ruling bloc controls the Lower House and the Upper House is under the opposition's control.

On Feb. 5, Aso held a preparatory meeting for the supraparty Federation of Diet Members for Promoting e-Local Government. Aso is expected to assume the post of chair of the group with DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama expected to assume the post of deputy chair. On Feb. 9, Aso delivered a speech on pension policy, in which he suggested shifting from the current system to finance basic pension from collected premiums to a system to finance basic pension entirely from tax revenue. The DPJ, too, has proposed the same system as Aso's

Some analyze Aso's move as wooing the DPJ, but Aso laughs off such analysis, saying, "They are off the point." But one LDP lawmaker who is involved in that federation frankly revealed that the purpose of establishing it is to build a good relationship with the DPJ. The lawmaker said, "It is better for Aso to have various kinds of personal networks with various groups, given the divided Diet." Aso, due to his strong conservative nature, has not until now established good relations with the DPJ. But with an eye on the next LDP presidential election, Aso has now judged it is better to overcome as many weak points he has as possible.

In the LDP, however, some frown on Aso's move with one senior member saying, "It's outrageous for him to behave as he does now at a time when the LDP is having a showdown with the DPJ." Even in his faction, a mid-level lawmaker expressed concern about Aso's move to hurriedly build a relationship with the DPJ, noting, "He needs to sort out whom he should contact."

(6) LDP eager to enact permanent law, while New Komeito and DPJ less enthusiastic

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
February 14, 2008

The Liberal Democratic Party's taskforce on a permanent law governing the overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces held its inaugural meeting at party headquarters yesterday. In the session, the chair, former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki, revealed a plan to submit a bill to the current Diet session for deliberations with the aim of enacting a permanent law at an early time. Meanwhile, the

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LDP's coalition partner, New Komeito, is reluctant to enact such legislation, and the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) is also taking a wait-and-see attitude, despite the LDP's expectations for its cooperation. The LDP's eagerness for enacting the bill stands out alone.

At the meeting, Yamasaki underlined the need for an early enactment of a permanent law, saying: "Unless a permanent law is enacted, Japan might not be able to deal with some situations."

Yamasaki's eagerness for speedy legislation is attributable to the fact that the current Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, the legal basis for the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling operation in the Indian Ocean, expires in January 2009.

The LDP's thinking is that in order to avoid the MSDF's refueling mission being suspended for the second time under the divided Diet in which the opposition bloc controls the House of Councillors, the country needs a legal system allowing the government to dispatch the SDF on overseas missions as necessary.

The envisaged permanent law must be enacted during the next extraordinary Diet session in the fall before the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law expires in January. Given slim chances for sufficient deliberation time in the extra Diet, a bill must be submitted during the current session for discussion to some extent.

The LDP sounded out the New Komeito on establishing a joint project team as early as Feb. 27. The New Komeito, which has discussed the matter at a pace of once or twice a week since January, is likely to respond to the LDP's call for beginning discussions in the ruling camp.

Discussions on a permanent law will inevitably escalate into debates on new options, including making changes to the constitutional interpretation in order to, for instance, expand the scope of cases in which the dispatched SDF personnel are allowed to use weapons. For this reason, the New Komeito is cautious about enacting a permanent law at an early date.

The LDP, which wants to obtain the DPJ's cooperation starting with discussions on the envisaged permanent law, is paying close attention to moves by the largest opposition party, which has many lawmakers with positive views about enacting permanent legislation.

LDP member and former Defense Agency chief Gen Nakatani on the phone yesterday proposed to DPJ shadow cabinet foreign minister Yoshio Hachiro that the two parties discuss a permanent law. Hachiro declined the proposal, saying: "We will not discuss it at this point when the ruling bloc's view is not clear."

The situation is that the DPJ, having opposed the refueling operation all along under the antiterrorism law, cannot easily begin talks with the LDP, which eyes permanent legislation for continuing the refueling operation.

(7) Ishiba's vision to integrate MOD and SDF personnel and unify three staff offices into one creates stir

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
February 13, 2008

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Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba's organizational restructuring vision to integrate the non-uniformed officers at the Ministry of Defense (internal bureaus) and uniformed personnel (Self-Defense Forces) is creating a stir. MOD bureaucrats worry about losing their predominance, while SDF officers fear that the integration will leave seeds of conflicts between the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces. Ishiba plans to launch later this month a project team composed of MOD bureaucrats and SDF officers to push ahead with the realignment.

At a meeting of the council to reform MOD under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office (Kantei), Ishiba proposed integrating the internal bureaus and SDF into three departments each responsible for (1) building up defense capabilities, (2) employment, and (3) accountability for the Diet and the general public. Ishiba underlined the need to review the system in which non-uniformed officers have been allowed to take the leadership in determining budgets and decision-making.

MOD bureaucrats' predominance goes back to 1950 when Home Ministry bureaucrats were allowed to play a central role in establishing the National Police Reserve (predecessor of the SDF) under the current Constitution from bitter lessons learned from the military's bloated power in the prewar period.

The Defense Agency and SDF were established in 1954. Since then, non-uniformed officers have been responsible for assisting the defense chief. The unwritten rule of not appointing SDF officers as senior MOD officials is still alive today.

Ishiba's vision comes from this view: Civilian control is a system in which elected civilian politicians control the SDF organization, including non-uniformed and uniformed officers; it is different from non-uniformed officers' predominance.

MOD officials are alarmed at the Ishiba vision, as seen in one official's comment: "If uniformed officers' authority is strengthened, the trend would become stronger that amateur, non-uniformed officers should not meddle in troop operations."

Ishiba also envisages integrating the Ground, Maritime, and Air Staff Offices into one, along with the internal bureaus.

A senior MOD official took this view about Ishiba's plan: "If one individual monopolizes the authority of the chiefs of the three forces, he would not be able to make appropriate decisions because he does not have know-how on matters concerning other forces. Troop morale might also decline depending on which one of the three forces becomes the top officer."

For the integrated operations of the Ground, Maritime and Air Self-Defense Forces, each force is shifting their operational functions to the Joint Staff, launched in 2006. A Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker with ties to defense interests said coldly: "(The defense minister) should consider integrated operations of the three forces ahead of organizational restructuring."

(8) What is Fukuda administration's environmental diplomacy? (Part 1): Environmental policy in view of relations with NGOs

ASAHI (Page 17) (Abridged)
February 7, 2008

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The Asahi Shimbun held a fifth panel discussion of its "Council to Discuss Asahi Shimbun's News Reports" at its head office in Tokyo on Jan. 28. The main theme of the discussion was the Asahi's "news reports on Japanese diplomacy and international issues." The way the daily deals with the environmental issues was also discussed.

Moderator: Katsuji Yoshida, chief of the Secretariat at the Council to Discuss Asahi Shimbun's News Reports

-- In coming May, Japan will host the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Yokohama City and after that, the Group of Eight Summit in Lake Toya, Hokkaido in July (G8 Toyako Summit). With those diplomatic events lying ahead, how do you rate the Asahi's news reports on Japan's diplomatic agenda?

Michiya Kumaoka, member of the council: At an annual meeting in January of the World Economic Conference in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Fukuda demonstrated his determination to lead the work of setting new country-selective greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to be applied to years beyond 2013. But this daily's "Jiji Kokkoku" (Hot topic) column dated Jan. 27 gave the impression that Fukuda did so out of his political judgment that a success of the G8 Toyako Summit could give a boost to his administration.

I want the Asahi to delve more into how the prime minister will lead the work of setting country-selective emission reduction targets, which he proposed despite opposition from business leaders and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) at home.

The Asahi also reported that the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is trying to work together with environment-oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in policy-making. When it comes to NGOs' and civic groups' participation in policy-planning or policy-making, Japan is said to be behind the United States and European countries, but various groups, stimulated by the upcoming G8 Toyako Summit, are sponsoring forums, working on the government, the ruling and opposition parties and other strata of the society, and increasing their influence. I think the Asahi needs to report on their moves, as well.

On the environmental issues, "Eco wars," a New Year's series, was a good project. What was most impressive in the series was that the Darfur conflict in Sudan, Africa, was analyzed in the context of not only ethnic and religious disputes but also the deteriorating environment and the spread of desertification. As the causes of the conflict, the article pointed out that the conflict is a struggle for leadership over who will manage natural resources against the backdrop of the destruction of nature.

A scramble for natural resources has two aspects: (1) one is related to resources, such as rare metals and oil and (2) the other is more fundamental and is related to basic resources like soil, water sources, fishing grounds, and forestry. I expect the Asahi to carry news reports in light of these two aspects.

When it comes to Africa, we Japanese tend to have a gloomy image of the continent as filled with conflicts and poverty. Indeed, conflicts and poverty exist there, but there are people and regions that have overcome such difficulties and established a vibrant community. The Asahi dealt with those aspects of Africa in its

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series "Changing Africa."

Japan has trimmed its official development assistance 40 PERCENT for the past decade. I expect the Asahi to report on the effectiveness of and adequacy for Japan's aid policy and ODA, including other countries' evaluation of Japan's aid policy and ODA.

Hayami Ichikawa, editor on foreign and international affairs: We have decided to focus our reporting in the area of diplomacy on (1) Japan-China relations, (2) the United States and Asia, (3) the North Korea issues, (4) each country's ulterior motives as to the environment, and (5) Africa, and (6) development and international cooperation. Of these, we will attach importance especially to the environment and Africa.

When we write news reports on the African issues, we try to somehow link them to Japan or the Japanese society, for we want to familiarize our readership with Africa.

Seiki Nemoto, editor for political affairs: The Fukuda administration's environmental diplomacy has been affected by political judgment as you pointed out. The government and the ruling bloc are wavering in their discussions. Prime Minister Fukuda mentioned he will set country-selective greenhouse emission reduction targets, but a tug of war is likely to continue between Fukuda and groups opposing his proposal.

Michiya Kumaoka: is director of the Japan International Volunteer Center (JIVC) and former president of the JIVC; born in 1947 and advisor to the Japan office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and guest professor at the University of Tokyo Graduate School.

SCHIEFFER